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RED HEAD

and

WHISTLE
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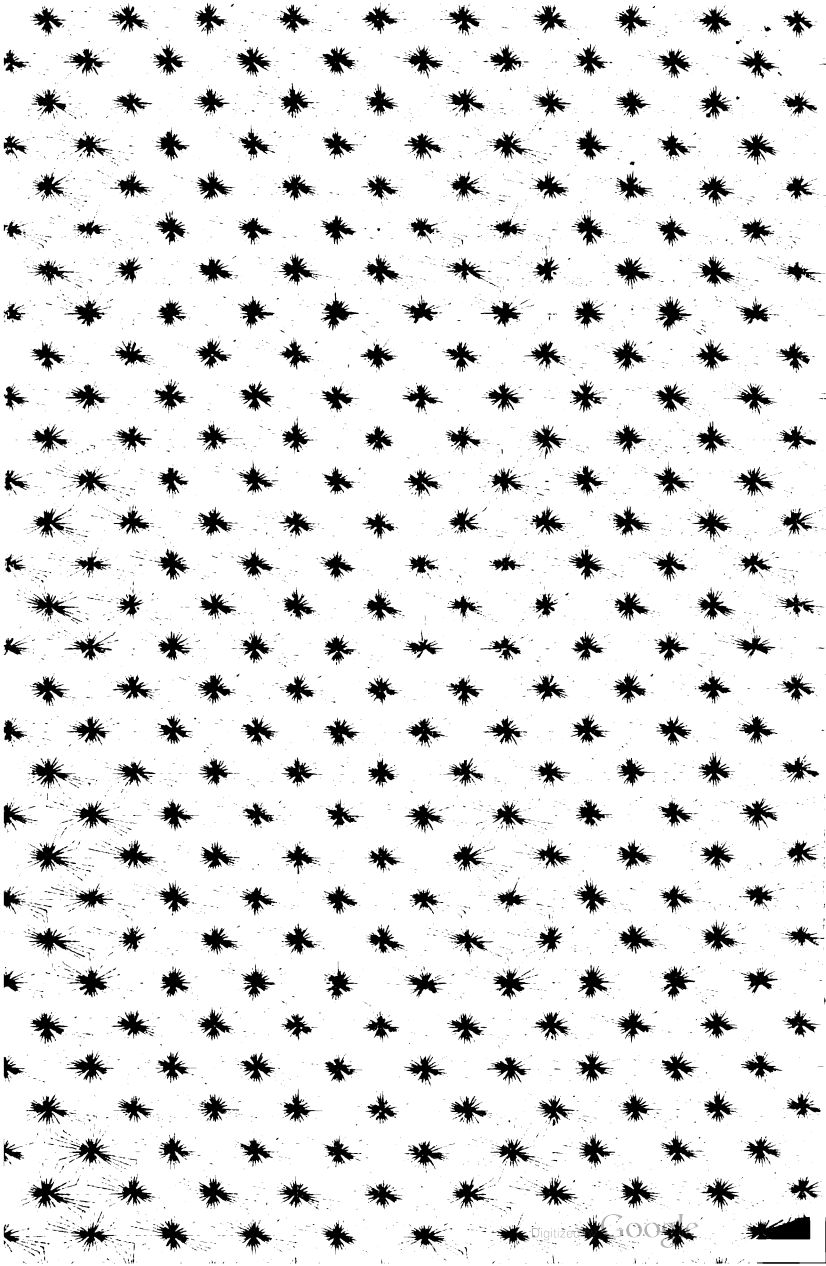


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***RED HEAD
AND
WHISTLE
BREECHES***

**It is believed that this little story
by a master story teller, may,
through its human interest and
homely suggestion, exert a whole-
some influence and warrant its
publication in permanent form.**

THE PUBLISHERS.

RED HEAD AND WHISTLE BREECHES

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

Author of "PIGS IS PIGS," "THAT PUP,"
"THE THIN SANTA CLAUS,"
"MIKE FLANNERY," Etc.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
By ARTHUR D. FULLER

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

*"Are you the Mike Murphy who used
to go to old No. 3 school?" . Frontispiece*

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Mike</i>	10
<i>Bessie</i>	18
<i>"They were good, stout breeches of dove colored corduroy, and his mother was proud of them" . .</i>	21
<i>Whistle Breeches</i>	26
<i>Red Head</i>	30
<i>"to slap the sleek legs of Mrs. Murphy's cow"</i>	35
<i>"Whistle—Bree-ches—Whistle— Bree-ches—Whistle—Bree-ches!" .</i>	39
<i>The Governor</i>	46
<i>After school is out</i>	48



***"Are you the Mike Murphy who used to go to
old No. 3 school?"***

I. RED HEAD AND WHISTLE BREECHES

By ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

When Tim Murphy let his enthusiasm get the better of his judgment and, in the excitement of that disastrous night, joined the front rank of the strikers in a general mix-up and cracked the head of a deputy sheriff, the result was what he might have expected—two years in the penitentiary. That was all right. The peace of the commonwealth must be preserved, and that is why laws and

[7]

RED HEAD AND

penitentiaries exist, but it sometimes goes hard with the mothers and wives. That is also to be expected, and the boy should have thought of it before he crowded to the front of the angry mob or struck the deputy.

It went very hard with the boy's mother and wife. It went hard with his old man, too. It is a cruel thing to have one's only boy in the penitentiary, even if one is only a village hod carrier.

Maggie Murphy, the boy's wife, did not suffer for food or shelter after the boy went to wear stripes, for old Mike had a handy little roll in the bank and a shanty of his

WHISTLE BREECHES

own, and he took Maggie into his home and made a daughter of her; but the girl grew thin and had no spirits. She cried a good part of the time, quite as if Tim had been a law abiding citizen, instead of a law breaking rowdy. Then the baby came, and after that she cried more than ever.

As for the boy's mother, it was to be expected that she would weep also. Mothers have a way of weeping over the son they love, even if he has gone wrong. It is not logical, but it is a fact. It is one of the grand facts of human life.

When Maggie's baby came the boy's mother could stand it no

RED HEAD AND

longer. It had been urged—and there was some evidence to support it—that the boy had acted in self-defense. He said so himself, but he admitted he had been in the front rank. The strikers had carried things with a high hand all along, and the jury had decided against him.

Night and day the boy's mother begged the old man to try for a pardon, but Mike knew it was not worth a trial. The Governor was an old man and a strong man, and not one to forgive an injury done to the State or to himself. He had never been known to forget a wrong, or to leave a debt unpaid.

[10]



WHISTLE BREECHES

He was a just man, as the ancient Jews were just. It was this that had made him Governor; his righteousness and fearlessness were greater than cliques and bosses.

Old Mrs. Murphy, however, was only a woman, and the boy was her boy, and she pardoned him. She knew he was innocent, for he was her boy. Mike refused a thousand times to ask the Governor for a pardon, but as Mrs. Murphy was the boy's mother and had a valiant tongue, the old man changed his mind. One day he put on his old silk hat, and with Father Maurice, the good gray priest, went up to the capital.

RED HEAD AND

A strange pair they were to sit in the Governor's richly furnished reception room—Mike with his smoothly shaven face, red as the sunset, his snowy eye brows, his white flecked red hair, and the shiny black of his baggy Sunday suit; Father Maurice with his long gray beard that had been his before the days of the smoothly shaven priests, his kindly eyes, and the jolly rotundity of his well fed stomach. The father's gentle heart was hopeful, but Mike sat sadly with his eyes on the toe of his boot, for he knew the errand was folly; not alone because the Governor had never pardoned a condemned

WHISTLE BREECHES

man, but because it was he, Mike Murphy, who came.

He remembered an incident of his boyhood, and he frowned as he recalled it. Think of it! He, Mike Murphy, had bullied the Governor—had drubbed him and chased him and worried the life out of him. That was why he had told the old woman it was no use to try it.

Who was he to come asking pardons when, years ago, he had done his best to make life miserable for the quaking schoolboy who was now the stern faced Governor—the Governor who never forgot or forgave, or left a debt unpaid?

RED HEAD AND

II.

When the Governor entered the reception room he came in unexpectedly, as Father Maurice was leaning forward with one of Mike's red hands clasped in his two white ones. Mike was wiping his eyes with his coat sleeve.

The Governor paused in the doorway and coughed. His visitors started in surprise, and then arose.

It was Father Maurice who stated their errand, his seamed face turned upward to the serious eyes of the Governor; and as he proceeded, choosing his quaint Frenchified

WHISTLE BREECHES

English carefully, the Governor's face became grave. He motioned them to their chairs.

He was a gray haired man, and his face was the face of a nobleman. Clear, gray eyes were set deep under his brows, and his mouth was a straight line of uncompromising honesty. He sat with one knee thrown over the other. With one hand he fingered a pen on the desk at his side; the other he ran again and again through the hair that stood in masses on his head. His face was long, and the cheekbones protruded. His nose was power, and his chin was resistance.

He listened silently until Father

RED HEAD AND

Maurice had ended. Then he laid the pen carefully by the inkstand, unfolded his gaunt limbs, and arose.

“No,” he said slowly. “I cannot interfere.”

“But his wife? His mother?” asked the priest.

“He should have considered them before,” said the Governor sadly.

“If you prepare a petition, I will consider it, but I cannot offer you any hope. They all come to me with the same plea—the wife and the mother—but they do not take the wife and the mother into account when the blow is struck. It is late to think of them when the prison door is closed. You will

WHISTLE BREECHES

pardon me, father, but I am very tired to-night."

He extended his hand, in token that the interview was at an end, and Mike arose from his chair in the shadow. He stood awkwardly turning his hat while the Governor shook the priest's hand, and then shuffled forward to be dismissed.

"Good night, sir," said the Governor. "I did not hear your name—"

"Murphy," said the priest quickly—"Michael Murphy. He is the father of the boy."

The Governor looked the old man over carefully, and the old man's eyes fell under his keen

RED HEAD AND

glances.

“Mike Murphy?” asked the Governor slowly. “Are you the Mike Murphy who used to go to old No. 3 school in Harmontown, forty—no, nearly fifty—years ago? There was a Mike Murphy sat on my bench. Are you the boy they called Red Head?”

The old man tried to answer. His lips formed the words, but his voice did not come. He nodded his head.

“Be seated, gentlemen,” said the Governor, and Father Maurice sat down hopefully. Mike Murphy dropped into a chair with deeper dejection.

[18]



WHISTLE BREECHES

“Well, well!” The Governor nodded his head slowly, his gray eyes searching the ruddy face before him. “So you are the Mike Murphy who used to drub me?”

He smiled grimly. His eyes strayed from the old man’s face, and their glance was lost in the air above his head. He smiled again, as he sat with the fingers of his left hand pressing the thin skin into a roll above his cheek bone, for he recalled an incident of his boyhood.

The Governor had once been an arrant little coward. His mother lived in the big white house two blocks above the schoolhouse, on

RED HEAD AND

the opposite side of the street. Red Head Mike lived across the alley in a shanty. The Governor's mother bought milk of Mrs. Murphy, and Red Head brought it every evening.

Red Head was a wonderful boy. He was the first to go barefoot in the spring, picking his way with painful carefulness over the clods in the street. He was the only boy who chewed tobacco. The others chewed licorice or purple thistle tops, but Red Head had the real thing. He even smoked a real pipe without dire consequences, and laughed at the other boys' mild substitutes of corn silk and "lady

WHISTLE BREECHES



*"They were good, stout breeches of dove colored
corduroy, and his mother was
proud of them."*

RED HEAD AND

cigars''; and the way he swore was a liberal education. All the boys swore more or less, especially when they were behind the barn smoking corn silk, but they knew it was not natural. It was a puny imitation, but the Red Head article sounded right.

But it was when it came to fighting that Red Head had proved his right to the worship of the world. He could lick any two boys in the school.

The Governor, who was plain Willie Gary then, could not fight at all. His early youth was one great fear of being whipped. The smallest boys in the school were

WHISTLE BREECHES

accustomed to practice on him until they gained sufficient dexterity or courage to attack one another. He had a hundred opprobrious nicknames, which he accepted meekly. "Cry-baby" was the favorite. When he was attacked he hid his face in his arm and bawled, leaning his arm against any convenient fence or tree, while his tormentor drubbed his back at pleasure. He was happy when he could sneak home unmolested. The chiefest of his tormentors was Red Head, but there was no partiality. All the boys drubbed him.

One day Mrs. Gary made him a pair of breeches. They were

RED HEAD AND

good, stout breeches of dove colored corduroy, and his mother was proud of them. So was Willie. As he walked to school he felt that every one saw and admired them. He felt as conspicuous as when, in a dream, he went to school in his night dress, but he felt more comfortable.

He took his seat in the school room proudly, and when he was called to the blackboard to do a sum he walked with a strut. He felt that even the big boys—the wonderful youths who had money to jingle in their pockets—observed him, and he blushed as he imagined the eyes of the little women

WHISTLE BREECHES

on the girls' side of the room following him.

As he crossed the floor, the legs of his breeches rubbed against each other, giving forth the crisp corduroy sound of "Whist—whist—whist." It could be heard in the farthest corner. All the scholars looked up from their slates or books. He caught Bessie Clayton's eye upon him, and his cheek flamed. She had blue eyes and yellow curls, and snubbed him daily.

Even the teacher glanced at his new breeches. Willie paused in his sum and looked at them with satisfaction himself. Then he

RED HEAD AND

walked back to his bench, and the corduroy spoke again—"Whist—whist—whist." It was as musical as the clumping of a new pair of red topped boots.

As he slid into his place on his bench, Red Head turned his face and made a mouth.

"Don't you think you're smart, Whistle Breeches?" he whispered.

"Whist—whist," said the breeches in reply, as Willie moved, and every eye in the school seemed to gaze on him, not enviously as before, but sneeringly. Who'd want whistle breeches?

When the recess bell rang, Willie walked to the playground

[26]



WHISTLE BREECHES

with short steps, but still the corduroy whistled. Two boys behind him laughed, and Willie burned with shame. They must be laughing at his new breeches. Bessie Clayton passed him, and he stood motionless, crowded against the wall, until she was out of hearing.

He paused in the doorway timidly. Red Head was standing just outside, one shoulder turned toward Freckles Redmond. It was the signal for a fight, and the small boys were crowded about them.

“Aw, you’re one yourself,” Red Head was saying, “an’ you dasan’t say it agin. I dare you to

RED HEAD AND

it," he cried, but he caught sight of Willie. "Huh!" he shouted. "Look here, fellers! Here's Whistle Breeches. Let's spit on 'em!"

The boys crowded into the entry and spat on them. Red Head pulled Willie's hair twice, drawing his head forward as he would pull a bell rope.

"Don't he think he's smart?" "Wouldn't have 'em!" "Whistle Breeches! Whistle Breeches!" they shouted in derision, and Willie whimpered and edged into a corner.

"Don't you do that," he said in a choking voice. "I'll tell teacher, I will!"

WHISTLE BREECHES

Red Head stuck his freckled face close and shoved him with a warlike shoulder. His fists were doubled, and he jabbed Willie with his elbow.

“Aw, you tell him, then, why don’t you, Whistle Breeches?” he inquired. “Jist you tell him, an’ I’ll punch your face off.”

He drew his arm back and feinted. Willie crooked his elbow to hide his face.

“Aw, come on, fellers,” said Red Head with deep disgust. “What’s the use of foolin’ with him? He ain’t nothin’ but a cry-baby in whistle breeches. He ain’t no fun.”

RED HEAD AND

III.

That noon Willie remained in the schoolroom until the boys had gone. Some went home for dinner, and the rest ate their lunches under the oak tree at the side of the school. When the room was clear, Willie stole out by the back way and ran rapidly up the alley. He knew he was branded for life. The shame of the name of Whistle Breeches bore him down. He meditated wild plans for getting rid of the offending garment. He would burn it, lose it in the river. He even considered running away

[80]



WHISTLE BREECHES

from home.

After dinner he slipped quietly away from the table, crept up to his room under the slanting roof, and put on his old, patched breeches. He came down quietly, but his mother caught him tiptoeing through the hall.

“Why, Willie,” she said, “where are your new trousers, dear?”

“Up-stairs,” he said simply. “I don’t want to wear them. They—they’re too tight.”

His mother saw the prevarication in the droop of his head.

“Nonsense!” she answered lightly. “They fit you perfectly,

RED HEAD AND

dear. If they are a little stiff now, they will soon wear soft. Go up and put them on."

"I don't want to," he replied stubbornly. He meant, "I will not," but he had learned the disadvantage of contradicting his mother flatly.

"William," said his mother sternly, "go up-stairs and put on those trousers this instant."

He climbed the stairs slowly. He hoped he would be late to school. He would be so leisurely in donning them that his mother would make him stay at home to avoid the greater disgrace of being tardy. He thought of playing sick, but

WHISTLE BREECHES

decided such an illness would be too sudden to excite his mother's sympathy. If only the schoolhouse would burn down, or word come that the teacher was dead! But neither came to pass, and his mother's voice sounded from the hall, bidding him hurry.

With his load of shame, he slunk out of the gate and crept to school, hugging the fences and making himself as insignificant and small as possible, walking with short steps to avoid the endless "whist—whist" of the corduroy. He sniffled as he thought of the wo the day still held for him. Some men, going back to business, glanced at

RED HEAD AND

him to see the cause of his whimpering. He imagined they were thinking cruel things of his breeches.

He heard the tardy bell ring, and then he ran in and hurried to his seat. As he hastened down the aisle the corduroy spoke louder than before, but if Red Head heard, he made no sign, and as Willie sidled on to the bench beside him he kept his nose buried in his book.

Willie did not go to the playground at the afternoon recess. He would have died rather, and for once he saw the advantage of the rule that the tardy scholar must

WHISTLE BREECHES



"to slap the sleek legs of Mrs. Murphy's cow."

RED HEAD AND

lose that half hour of play.

When school ended for the day, Willie hoped the teacher would keep him in. He was willing to be whipped rather than meet Red Head again, but he was dismissed with the rest. He paused in the doorway, gathering his breath to make a run for liberty, as he had often run to escape his persecutors. As he waited, he saw Red Head approaching, and he drew back; but Red Head stepped up to him and took him by the arm.

“You let me alone now!” whimpered Willie.

“Aw, shut up,” said Red Head roughly. “I ain’t goin’ to hurt

WHISTLE BREECHES

you. You shut up an' don't be a cry-baby. Come along an' I won't let 'em hurt you."

Fighting and scuffling were not allowed in the entry. Willie put his thumb in his mouth and gazed at Red Head doubtfully. Such friendliness was unnatural. It savored of a plot to entice him forth to be slaughtered. It was not easy to believe that the Red Head who had drubbed him a hundred times, and who scorned him as a cry-baby, should seek to defend him.

Red Head waited.

"Come on," he said at length.
"I'll let you help me drive the cow

RED HEAD AND

home tonight."

Still Willie hesitated, although he was almost willing to risk a licking to be allowed to slap the sleek legs of Mrs. Murphy's cow with a limber willow switch.

"Come on," said Red Head. "I'll let you smoke my pipe."

"Won't you lick me?" asked Willie doubtfully.

"Naw, I won't lick you. What would I want to lick you for?"

Willie followed Red Head hesitatingly, with an eye to a safe retreat, if necessary.

One of the boys came forward from the group by the gate.

"Hi, here comes Whistle

WHISTLE BREECHES



*"Whistle—Bree-ches—Whistle—Bree-ches—
Whistle—Bree-ches!"*

RED HEAD AND

Breeches!" he shouted gleefully.

Red Head turned and clenched his fists, his blue eyes blazing.

"Shut up, Bob Palmer!" he cried fiercely. "Don't you call him that. That ain't no name to call a feller. You jist wisht you had breeches like 'em!"

Bob stopped suddenly. He looked at Red Head in astonishment. Then he turned and ran to the boys by the gate. They listened to what he said, and then began a loud sing-song chant: "Whistle—Bree-ches—Whistle—Bree-ches—Whistle—Bree-ches!"

Red Head bounded forward, his eyes glowing with anger. He top-

WHISTLE BREECHES

pled two boys over, and rained his blows right and left.

“Don’t youse call him that!” he cried.

It was a surprise. The boys drew back and stood ready to scatter at the next onslaught. Red Head waited, puffing, with clenched fists.

“The next feller that calls him that, I’ll break his face!” he threatened. “An’ I ain’t foolin’, neither.”

They saw that he was not, and they waited respectfully as Red Head and Willie walked away.

Willie went with Red Head to drive the cow home, and Red Head taught him how to double up his fist for battle according to the tra-

RED HEAD AND

ditions of the school, with the knuckle of the second finger protruded.

“You jist do that,” he explained, “an’ you can hurt ’em worse. An’ if they fight back, kick ’em in the legs. That’s how I do. Why, you’re as big as I am, an’ I bet you’re jist as strong. You jist stand up to ’em. There ain’t nothin’ in fightin’ when you know how. If you jist stand up to ’em, they ’most always back down. You begin on Tom Ament. He’s a bigger baby’n you are. Anybody kin lick him. I kin lick him with my little finger. An’ then you tackle Shorty. He’s a baby, too. You’re

WHISTLE BREECHES

jist afraid."

It was Red Head who egged Willie on to strike Tom Ament the next day, and Red Head coached him until Tom took to his heels, defeated. Then Red Head made him lick Shorty, and with the lust of victory in his veins Willie worked his way upward, and soon the other mothers began telling Willie's mother that he was a bad boy, always fighting, and Mrs. Gary wept over him. But no one called him Whistle Breeches, and he learned that he was as much of a man as any of them, and more of a man than most.

Then came a battle royal, when

[48]

RED HEAD AND

Red Head and Willie stood face to face and pounded each other for a good half hour for supremacy, and Willie went down with a bleeding nose and an eye that was dark for days.

But Red Head had taught him self confidence, and self confidence made him the Governor of a great State.

WHISTLE BREECHES

IV.

When the Governor's eyes came back to Mike Murphy's face, they rested a moment on the grizzled red hair, and a smile softened the lines of his mouth.

"Mike," he said, "I believe you used to give me a drubbing about once every day."

The old Irishman moved uneasily, and his hands played nervously with the rim of his hat. He drew his feet under his chair, and moved his lips without speaking. He thought of that last fierce battle, when the Governor had fallen with

RED HEAD AND

a bleeding nose, and he shifted his eyes from spot to spot on the soft carpet. He felt as does a mouse when the cat plays with it.

The Governor turned to Father Maurice.

“Father,” he said, “I do not often allow myself a personal indulgence, but I have an unsettled score with Mike. I shall settle it now. I am going to pardon that young man.”

Two tears fell from the priest's eyes and rolled slowly into the white forest of his beard. Mike Murphy stared straight before him, while his fingers felt vaguely for the rim of the hat that had fallen

[46]



WHISTLE BREECHES

from his hands.

“Go home, Mike,” said the Governor gently. “Go home and tell the wife and the mother.”

When his petitioners had departed, the Governor sat long in the reception room, thinking of the old days. When he opened his watch it was not to note the hour, but to look on a woman's likeness; and he crossed his arms on the desk and buried his face in them. The old days had given him much that the later years had stolen from him. He sighed and lifted his head.

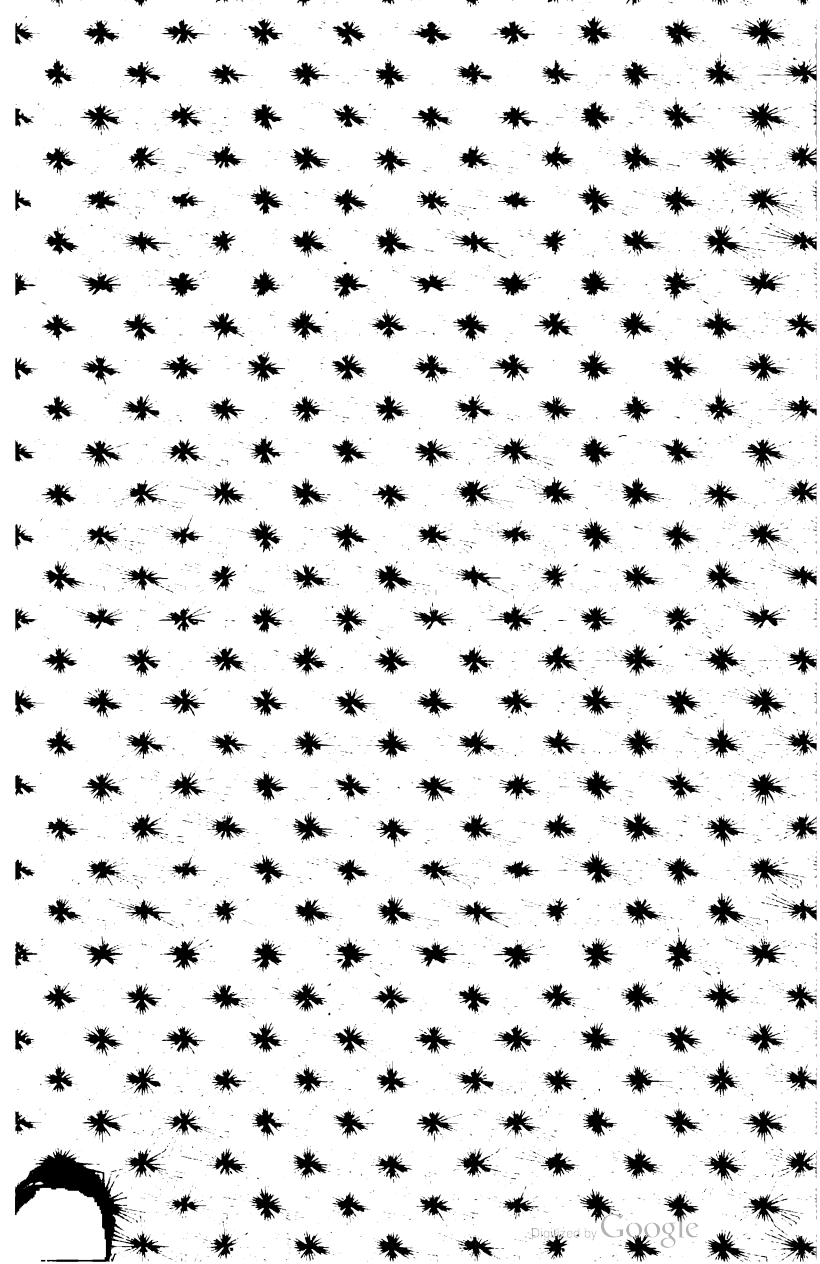
“Poor old Mike!” he said. “I'm square with him at last. I wonder

WHISTLE BREECHES

why he took my part that day?"
And he wearily climbed the stair to
his lonely room.

He did not know that when
Red Head went home that noon,
nearly fifty years before, he had
found Mrs. Murphy cutting out a
pair of corduroy breeches.





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